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ABSTRACT

A review of changes at the U.S. Air Force Academy since women entered as cadets in 1976 focuses on male student attitudes and male and female performance. It is found that in general women are succeeding well at the institution, competing favorably with men in academics, military training, and athletics. Overall attrition rates for women in the first class are lower than for men, with academic attrition half that for men. Women are moving into high cadet leadership positions with success. Although male cadets are in general not convinced females can succeed in nontraditional roles they have become more accepting of women at the Academy. Since most women cadets develop relationships with male cadets rather than civilian males, a significant increase in dual military career families is expected in the near future. Great increases are seen in self-confidence and leadership abilities among the women students. (MSE)

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THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN CADETS INTO THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY (AN UPDATE)

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(Much of the material in this paper is taken from the research efforts of DeFleur, Gillman, Marshak and Harris, colleagues of the author at the Air Force Academy and at Washington State University.)

INTRODUCTION

Women are increasingly entering Air Force jobs previously held by only men. Both officer and enlisted women now have the opportunity to work in almost every career field -- if it does not involve combat. Women are now working as jet mechanics, heavy equipment operators, base commanders, pilots and aircraft maintenance officers -- all of which are jobs held only by males a few years ago. Women are performing well in these jobs.

In this paper the author attempts to summarize what has happened so far at the Air Force Academy since women entered as cadets in 1976. Areas covered include male cadet attitudes toward female cadets, characteristics of entering males and females, performance of males and females, changing attitudes toward women's roles and acceptance of women into this previously all-male environment.

CADET ATTITUDES

Research interest on attitudes of Air Force Academy cadets has focused on the acceptance of women in nontraditional roles. Hypotheses for these studies of attitudes centered around the prediction that male cadets would become more accepting of female cadets as time passed and the males observed that females could succeed in a nontraditional environment. The Spence-Helmreich Attitudes Toward Women Scale has been used in measuring attitudes of cadets as well as scales constructed from factor analysis of questionnaires developed and used previously by DeFleur and Gillman. Analyses of early data pointed up that when women cadets first arrived they had strong

positive attitudes toward women at the Academy and that those attitudes did not change; however, attitude scores of female cadets concerning women as military leaders did show a slight move away from such a positive belief. This showed up in the results of the January 1979 survey. This might be explained by the fact that these women had recently completed their first efforts in leadership positions and had some misgivings about the degree of success they had achieved. A somewhat surprising finding was that male cadets' attitudes toward women became more traditional after initial interaction with female cadets. By traditional, we mean belief that a women's place is in the home, women can't do the same jobs men do, etc. This can probably be explained by the fact that the men and women were in different living arrangements; women simply could not perform as well in the gruelling physical environment and the perception of men that the requirements of Basic Cadet training were easier for the women. Recent evaluations of cadet attitudes show that male cadets are becoming more accepting of the fact that there will be women cadets at the Academy, but are even more firm in their belief that women cannot be effective military leaders. Additionally male cadets very definitely believe that women should not be in combat roles. (TABLE 1 HERE)

CHARACTERISTICS OF ENTERING MALE AND FEMALE CADETS

Students who enter the Air Force Academy score well above the national average of college-bound seniors on math aptitude and achievement, verbal aptitude and composition, social studies and natural science (measured by the CEEB and ACT). They also score high on athletic and leadership abilities. Air Force Academy male cadets score somewhat lower academically than female cadets. Women's academic composite scores generally fall within the sixty-sixth percentile of the men's score, placing the average female entrant's score with the top one-third of the males.

PERFORMANCE OF MEN AND WOMEN CADETS

Women cadets have performed very well in all aspects of Academy life. At the end of the first year, the Grade Point Average (GPA) for men in the Class of 1980 was 2.69 on a four point scale, while for women it was 2.61. This difference is not significant but probably does represent, to some degree, difficulties females have in traditional male areas of science and mathematics. Both males and females take many courses in these areas. Data at the end of the Spring 1979 semester show that males in the Class of 1980 have a GPA of 2.79 and that females have an average of 2.82, suggesting that women are able to compete favorably with men in a highly technical academic environment. (TABLE 2 HERE) Cadets at all service academies carry a heavy math and science load. Table 2 shows GPA data for all classes with women. Academic attrition for women in the Class of 1980 is 6.6%, while for men in that class it is 12.3%. Scores of women cadets in Military Order of Merit (MOM) are similar to those of males. Almost the same percentage of females as males score in both the upper and lower quartile. The inputs to MOM are ratings by cadet officers, peer ratings, scores from military studies classes, conduct and discipline evaluations and military assignment performance reports. Male cadets tend to rate female cadets somewhat lower than do other female cadets. As we approach the beginning of another school year we find that women have moved into several significant leadership positions. Two female cadets are on Wing Staff with one serving as Wing Sergeant Major, the highest rank any second classman (Junior) can hold; seven are serving on Group Staff and one is commander of a cadet squadron.

In Physical Fitness Tests (PFT) females have approximately the same failure rate as males. Women now perform all the same items as men (pull-ups, running, long-jump, etc.) but do less of each requirement. The physical tasks have proven somewhat more difficult for them because they tend to come in a little overweight, not used to running a lot and very weak development of upper-body strength; however, after a year or so their physical condition and stamina increase dramatically.

RECENT OBSERVATIONS

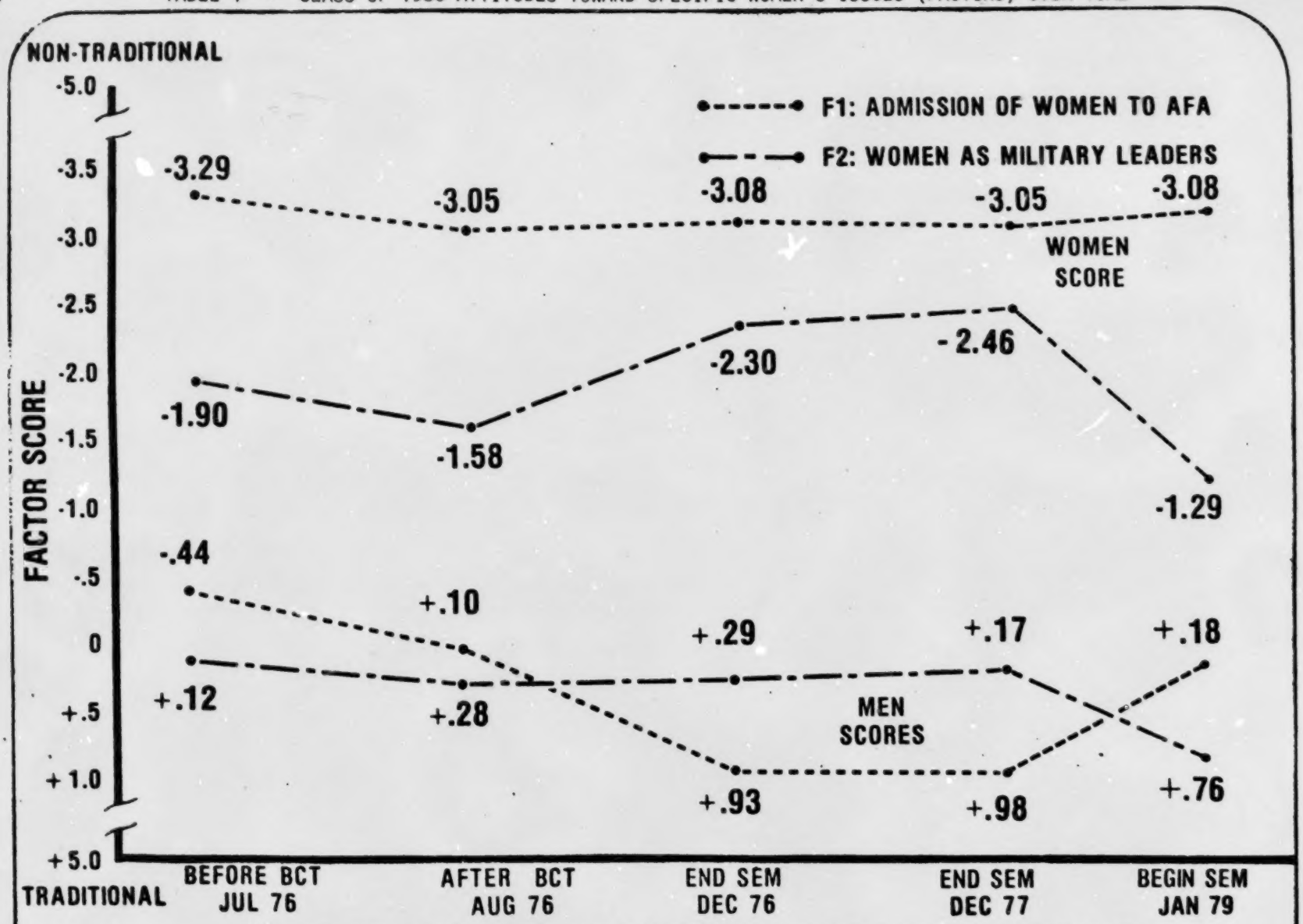
A recent survey by DeFleur, et al focuses on changing roles for men and women in the military and problems in the integration of career, marriage and family for future officers. Approximately one-half of the women cadets report that they are planning to serve their first commitment to the Air Force and then return to civilian life. There is a strong correlation between planning to leave after fulfilling the first commitment and traditional attitudes. Those who felt strongest about traditional roles for women were those reporting less desire for a full Air Force career (20 or more years). Additionally, these young women were planning to enter such traditional Air Force jobs for women as personnel, administration and finance. On the other hand, those who had high rank aspirations and planned on a full career were those who most strongly believed that women could succeed very well in nontraditional roles. Female cadets subscribe to marriage and family goals but a significant proportion also want careers. Over half believe they will be in dual-career status in fifteen years and only a very small proportion thought they would be married without careers. A survey completed in February of this year focused on the relationship between attitudes toward women's roles and cadet perceptions of their life in fifteen years. These relationships were in the predicted direction; i.e., cadets with more traditional attitudes toward sex roles also expressed more traditional preferences in future life styles. Young women with less enthusiastic attitudes toward women in leadership and combat roles tended to expect to enter the more traditional career fields and did not expect to make high rank. Males who preferred that their wives be homemakers and that the children be raised traditionally were those who most strongly resisted the idea of women at the Academy and who believed women could not succeed in nontraditional roles. An interesting finding in terms of relationship with the opposite sex was that very few male cadets reported they were engaged or had a definite commitment while over half the females reported being

engaged or having serious involvements. 85% of the females indicated they were involved with cadets or other military personnel, while males indicated they were involved with local civilian women or those from outside the local area.

SUMMARY

In general, women are succeeding very well at the Air Force Academy. They are competing favorably with men in all three major Academy areas: academics, military training, and athletics. Overall attrition rates for women in the first class are lower than for men, with academic attrition for women being approximately half that for men. Women are moving into high cadet leadership positions and proving they can succeed in this demanding environment. Although male cadets, in general, are not yet convinced females can succeed in nontraditional roles they have become more accepting of women at the Academy. Since most women cadets develop relationships with male cadets rather than with civilian males we can expect a significant increase in the number of dual-career military families in the near future. Finally, we see great increases in self-confidence and leadership abilities as these young women progress through the Academy system and we predict they will become fine officers.

TABLE 1 - CLASS OF 1980 ATTITUDES TOWARD SPECIFIC WOMEN'S ISSUES (FACTORS) OVER TIME



CLASS OF 1980 ATTITUDES TOWARDS SPECIFIC WOMEN'S ISSUES [FACTORS] OVER TIME

TABLE 2

GRADE POINT AVERAGES FOR MALE AND FEMALE CADETS
FALL 1976 THROUGH SPRING 1979

	Fall 76	Spring 77	Fall 77	Spring 78	Fall 78	Spring 79	Cumulative
				Class of 1980			
Male	2.67	2.66	2.71	2.74	2.69	2.82	2.79
Female	2.62	2.59	2.61	2.85	2.84	2.58	2.82
				Class of 1981			
Male			2.67	2.82	2.78	2.79	2.82
Female			2.48	2.49	2.48	2.58	2.60
				Class of 1982			
Male					2.69	2.77	2.76
Female					2.71	2.68	2.70

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Air Force.